DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 212 457 RC 013 203

AUTHOR Juel, Connie; Roper/Schneider, Diane
TITLE Teacher Psychology in Two Small Mexican-American School Districts.
PUB DATE Feb 82
NOTE 16p.; Paper copy not available due to publisher preference.

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Age Differences; Classroom Techniques; Comparative Analysis; *Decoding (Reading); Elementary Secondary Education; *Interprofessional Relationship; Mexican American Education; *Mexican Americans; Phonics; Professional Continuing Education; *Professional Development; *Stress Variables; Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Texas (Anthony); *Texas (Canutillo)

ABSTRACT

In order to understand teachers' perceptions of their school, students, and community, a questionnaire was administered to 125 teachers in the Canutillo (Texas) school district and 25 teachers in the adjacent Anthony (Texas) school district. The questionnaire elicited information of teachers' perception with regard to content knowledge, classroom management, interprofessional relations, special education, issues, curriculum, and professional and personal information. Some questions were given to both teachers and students. On the whole, teachers showed little enthusiasm for more training and seemed more concerned with obtaining further certification than increasing classroom skills. Younger teachers appeared both more confident in their work and more willing to further their training. Teacher stress was the educational issue of most concern. Teachers felt that they were in a professionally stressful situation without any strong group support for empathy, and seemed to find problems when interacting with other teachers. Two-thirds of the teachers liked the subject they were teaching and were comfortable with their professional role and cultural identity. Over half favored participating in a program directed at changing students' attitudes toward school. Only one-third felt informed about the goals of the school district. Results indicated that teachers and students had different perceptions of which subjects were important. (CM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED212457

TEACHER PSYCHOLOGY IN TWO SMALL MEXICAN-AMERICAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

by

Lewis Aptekar, Ph.D.

Department of Educational Psychology

The University of Texas at El Paso

February 1982

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lewis Aptekar

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

RC 013203

TEACHER PSYCHOLOGY IN TWO SMALL MEXICAN-AMERICAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Introduction

The Rio Grande runs through the central part of New Mexico before turning east where it borders Texas and Mexico. The pastel blues and browns characterize the high Chihuahuan desert, population centers are spotted on the banks of the Rio grande, but as one moves away from the river bottom, there is an experience of immense sky and open plains. There is a junction of New Mexico, Texas and Mexico that occurs near El Paso, Texas. In this region, the histories of these communities are mixed to form a culture of Mexican-Americans whose common heritage and living conditions merge toward what one could expect, common views toward American society, and with regard to this study, a common view toward educating their children.

Anthony, Texas, and Canutillo, Texas, are two small towns adjacent to El Paso, Texas. The population of Anthony is nearly 3,000; Canutillo, 7,500. There are 474 students in Anthony, 76 percent of which are Mexican-American. In Canutillo, there are 2,395 students and 86.6 percent of these

are Mexican-American. Nearly 90 percent of the students in both districts qualify for free lunch programs.

In order to understand the perceptions that teachers have of their school, students and community, a questionnaire was administered to all teachers in these two small adjacent school districts. The questionnaire elicits information of teachers' perception in the areas of:

1. Content knowledge
2. Classroom management
3. Interprofessional relations
4. Special education
5. Issues
6. Curriculum
7. Professional and personal information

The above information was tabulated for frequencies and then cross-tabulated for years of teaching experience, level of grade being taught, and school district. Also, some questions were given to both teachers and students, and comparisons between the two groups are also evaluated.

Teachers

There are 125 teachers in the Canutillo School District and 25 teachers in Anthony. They are very young districts: two-thirds of the teachers are less than 40 years of age and

a third of the teachers are less than 30 years old. Forty-three percent of the teachers received degrees since 1974; 71 percent of the teachers have less than six years teaching experience and 50 percent of the teachers have had no other teaching jobs.

Sixty percent of the teachers are female. Fifty-eight percent of the teachers are teaching the level that they are certified in. Less than half (43.3 percent) belong to professional organizations.

Results

Figure 1

The results of Figure 1 illustrate the percentage of teachers desiring further training in the basic skills. As expected, reading is the area that teachers perceive as the most cogent. Principally, the elementary school teachers desired the further training in teaching reading and the high school teachers desired further training in writing. Math was constant throughout the grades.

Those with four years or less experience seemed more interested in taking further training in all three of the basic skills than those teachers with more experience.

The percentage of teachers desiring further certification surpasses the percentage of teachers desiring further training in the basic skills. Does this illustrate that teachers, like their students, are more often concerned with the grade or the end result, than the process or educational experience?

Figure 2

Teachers were asked, "Do you need more training?" in a series of questions about classroom management. All of the responses are low, indicating that teachers see little use in further training. In fact, when these questions are compared with the questions on teacher stress (Figure 5), almost twice as many teachers wanted further training in how to handle professional stress than on any of the indicators of classroom management, which is a paradox that only makes sense by understanding that teacher stress comes more from colleague, community and administrator interactions than from classroom experience.

Figure 3

Figure 3 examines both the teachers' desire for further training in professional relations and their perceptions of support from other professionals in the community. Teachers show little interest in further training for professional

relations. They feel isolated and not supported by the community, teachers or administrators. This isolation reveals a sense of apathy on their part and without support, they feel little use in exploring these professional relationships and, thus, are harnessed with a sense of isolation which compounds the burden of professional stress.

Figure 4

The responses in Figure 4 demonstrate that more teachers are interested in further study of the problems found with Special Education and mainstreaming than they are in further study of the basics (Figure 1). It is interesting to note that, for most of the variables on special education, it was Kindergarten through 6th grade level teachers who desired further training, and it was the less experienced (newer) teachers who were more in favor of further training than the older, more experienced teachers. This duplicates the findings of the basic skills when the younger teachers are more interested in further training and begins to reveal a pattern which shows that the younger teachers are desiring more training than their older counterparts.

What stands out in this graph is first the high rate of response to professional stress, a considerably higher rate than any of the basic skills or to the classroom

management variables. When coupled with the low interest in unions, it reveals a rather unfortunate situation. Here we have teachers who feel they are in a professionally stressful situation, yet without any strong group support for empathy or even sympathy. When we examine the results of the classroom management data, we can see even more closely that, rather than finding support from other teachers, teachers seem to find problems when interacting with other teachers, so that those who might be able to ease the stress are in fact contributing to it.

Figure 6

The response to the curriculum variables are rather unsurprising, but when the cross tabulations were examined, the results became interesting. Contrary to the trend, the younger teachers seem to feel more confident in test construction, test evaluation and the use of media, than the more experienced teachers. Most likely, this reflects that the younger teachers had ample exposure and practice for these skills in their teacher training programs.

Figure 7

Here the teachers' response is quantitatively more than on any of the other questions. Two-thirds of the teachers like the subject they are teaching, are comfortable

with their professional role and their cultural identity. Only one-third think that children have positive attitudes about school, and over one-half favor participating in a program directed at changing students' attitudes toward school. Only one-third benefit from inservice.

Interestingly, only one-third of the teachers felt they were informed about the goals of the school district, while 52 percent were ready to give strong support to the school district and 50 percent more than the number who said they were informed, agreed with the goals of the district.

Comparisons Between Teachers and Students

When the needs perceived by the teachers are matched with the needs perceived by students, some discrepancies exist. To the extent of these differences, motivational problems will exist between students and teachers because one group sees a particular problem or subject area as being more important to learn than the other group. Thus, they will have a different motivational feeling toward the teaching process. For example, 50 percent of the teachers want further training in teaching reading, but only 37 percent of the students want to study it further. Students, on the other hand, favored more discipline (42 percent-27 percent) than their teachers. Students are not much interested in

sex or drug education, but preferred that time be used for career education, while teachers saw drug and sex education as being more important. These mismatches are easy to discern and contribute to motivational or behavioral problems. The discrepancies are likely to be worked out through classroom interactions and, as a result of this, tempers and bad feelings are going to be elicited.

Conclusions

Teachers on the whole showed little enthusiasm for more training. What enthusiasm existed seems more concerned with obtaining further certification than increasing classroom skills.

Of the teachers who were interested in further certification, 18 percent wanted special education; 34 percent wanted to be counselors; 12 percent were interested in mid-management certificates; and 32 percent wanted to be reading specialists.

The younger teachers appeared both more confident in their work and more willing to further their training than their senior counterparts.

Teacher stress, which was once an unknown problem, now seems to have reached these two small rural districts, as it is the educational issue of most concern to the teachers.

A variety of questions determining the importance of certain educational issues were given both to teachers and students. The results indicate that teachers and students have different ideas of what is important to learn. This difference is postulated to be as a cause of discipline problems.

ERIC/CRESS RECEIVED MAR 1982

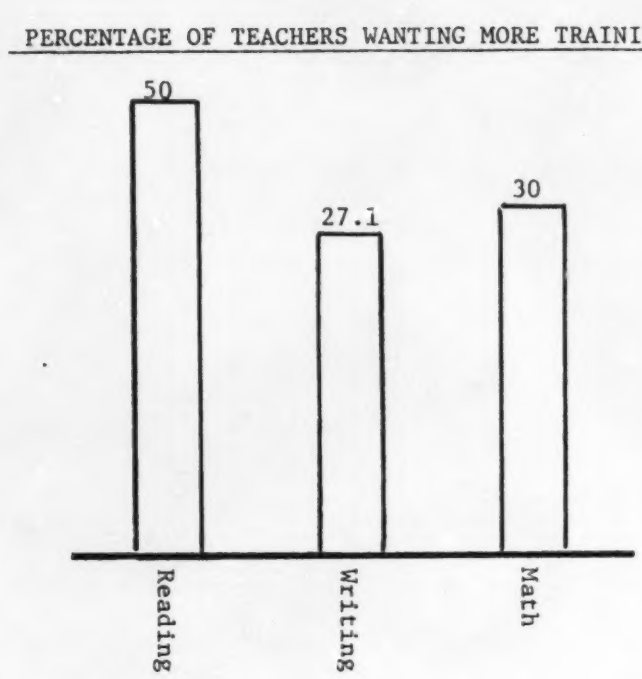

Figure 1. Content Knowledge

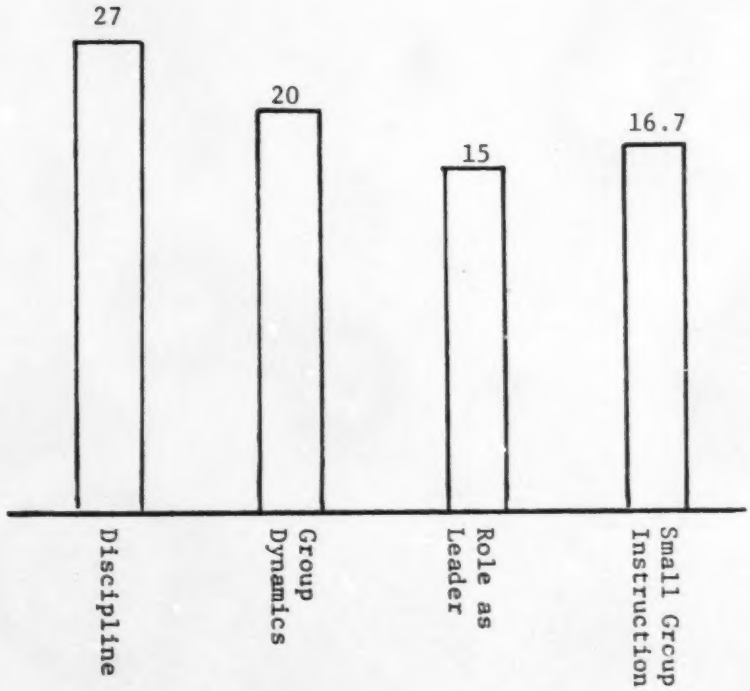

Figure 2. Classroom Management

PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WANTING MORE TRAINING

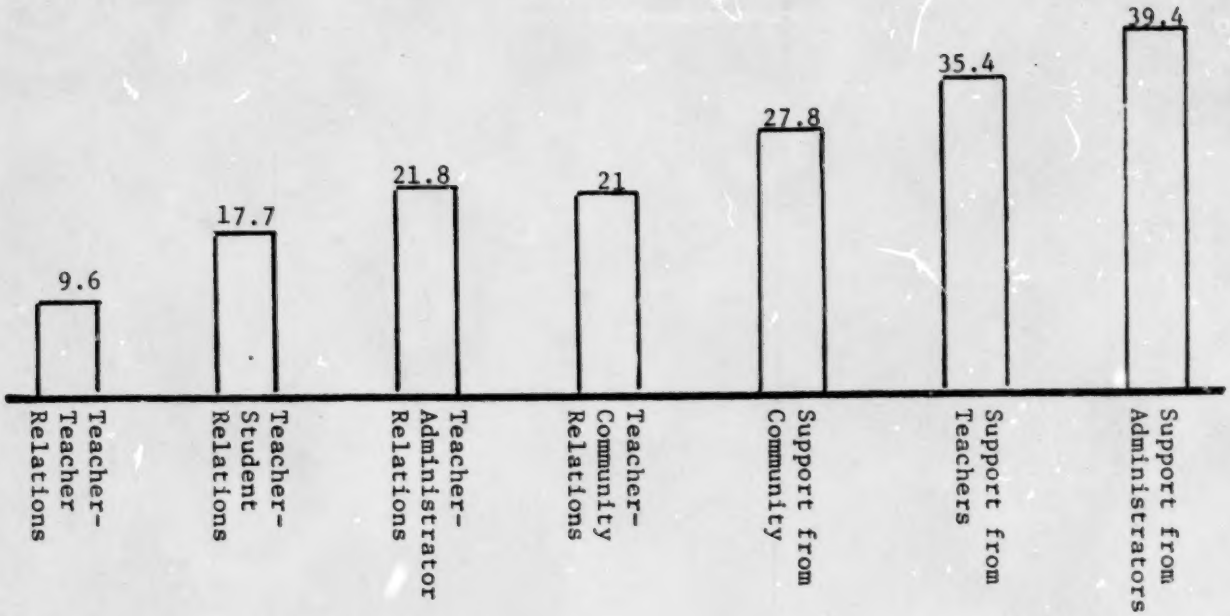

Figure 3. Interprofessional Relations

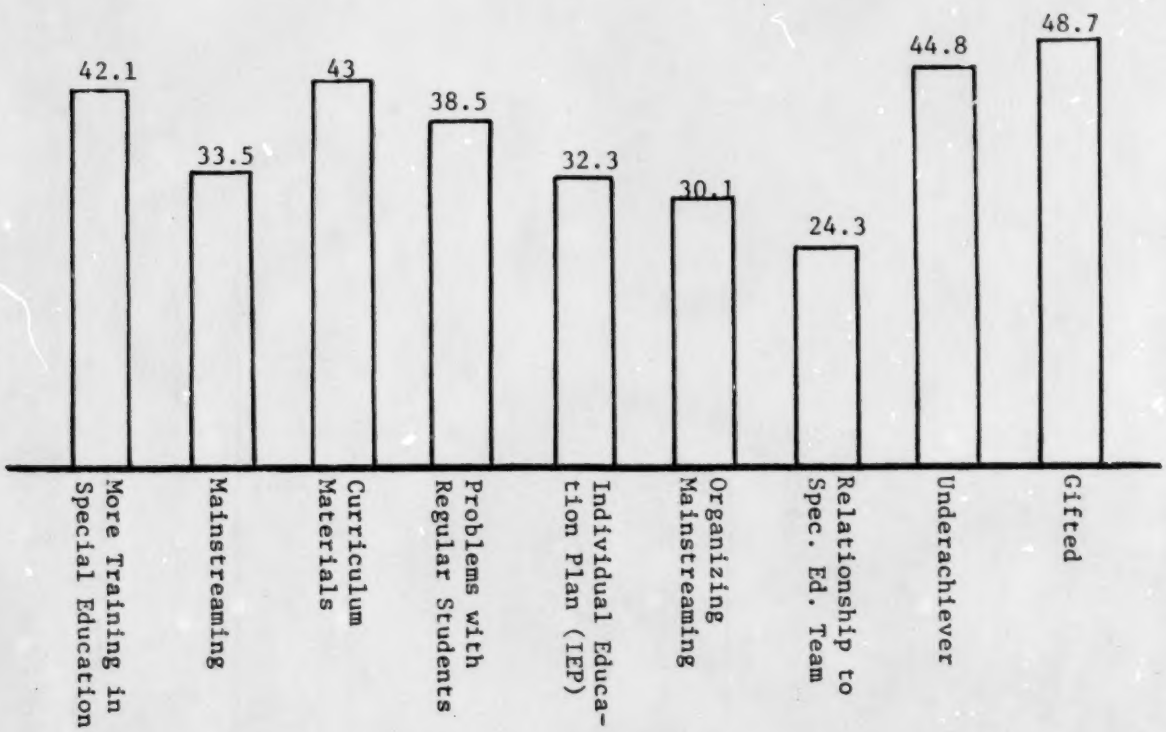

Figure 4. Special Education

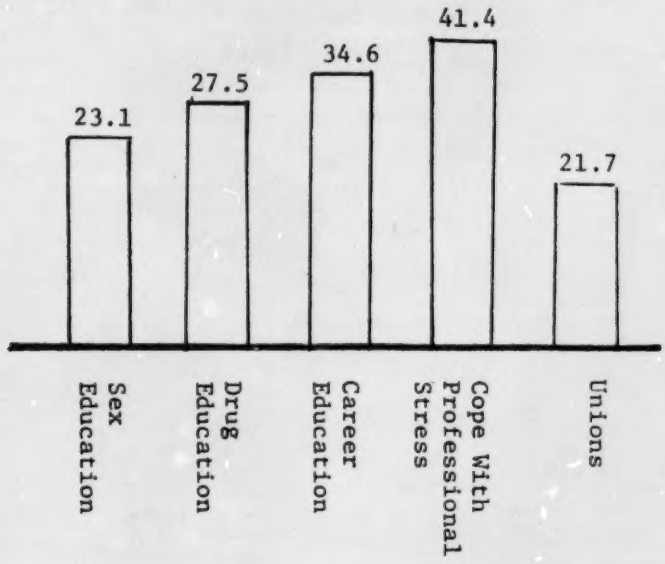

Figure 5. Issues

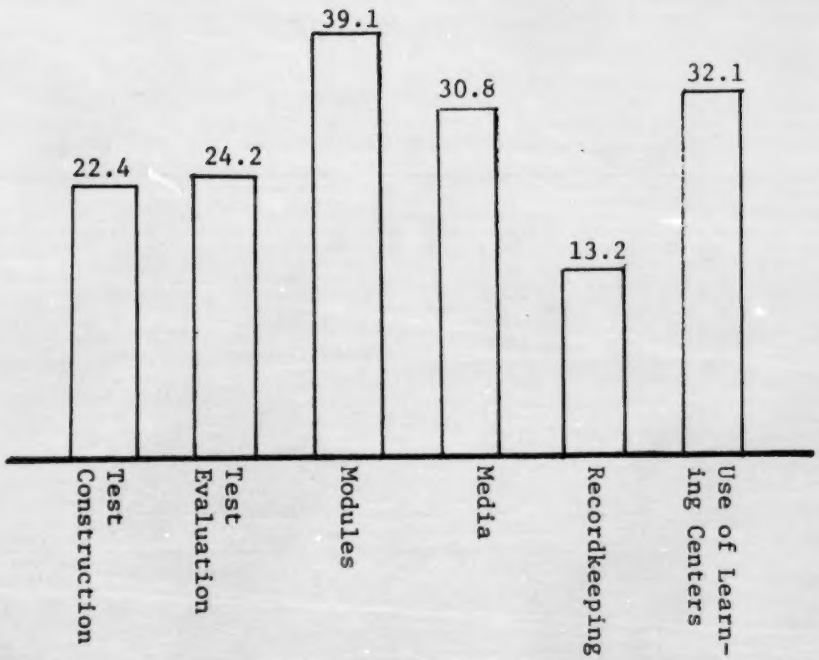

Figure 6. Curriculum

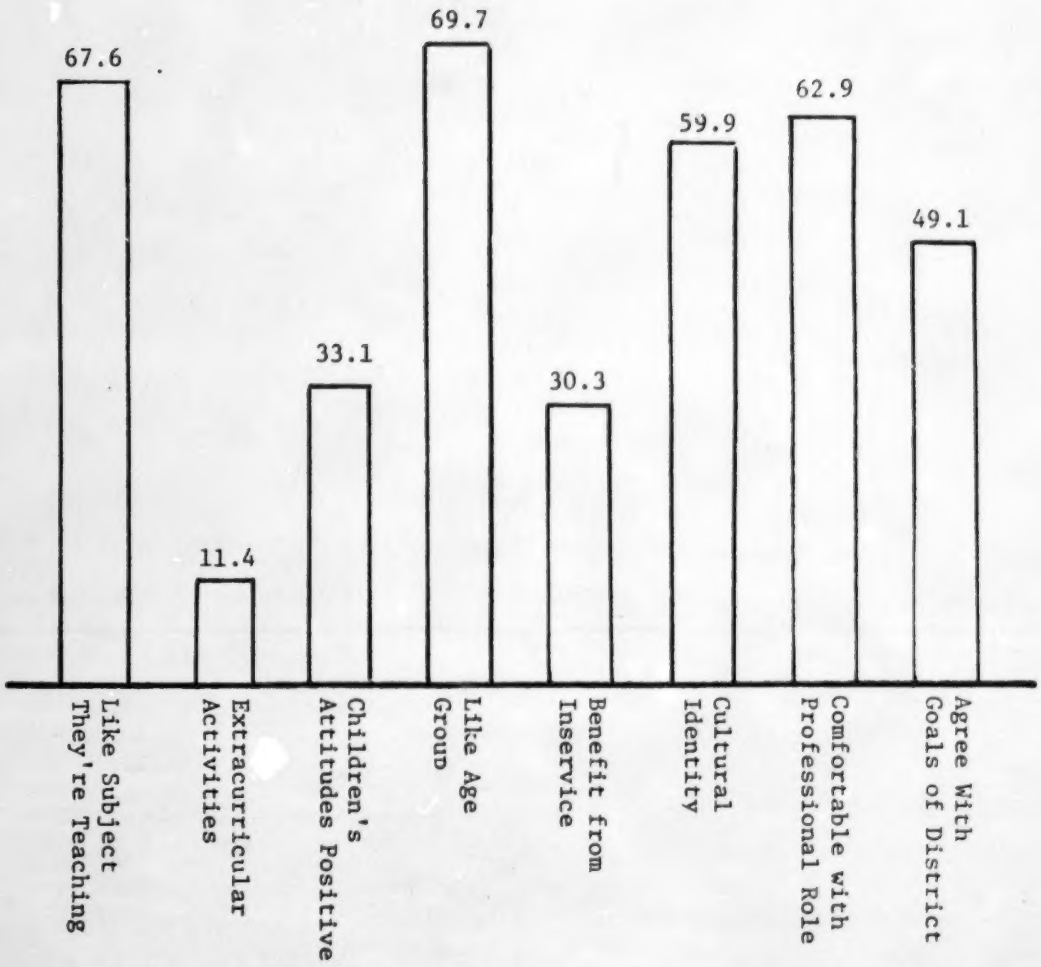

Figure 7. Professional and Personal Information